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Have Iben, Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen: Digital Audiobooks: New Media, Users and Experiences

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As the world keeps evolving, it is inevitable to say that technology influences most of the things in our daily life. Audiobooks are rapidly gaining popularity with the massive access to digital downloading and streaming services that are taking over all entertainment and culture markets including, of course, literature. *Digital Audiobooks: New Media, Users and Experiences* analyzes the digital form of audiobooks, portraying audiobook listening as both a ‚remediation‘ (p.7) of literature and an everyday activity that creates a new experience, a new form of reading that can be related to other sensorial everyday activities, like listening to music or the radio.

Iben Have’s and Stougaard Pedersen’s book is part of a series of studies in new media and cyberculture, which includes monographs and edited collections that provide new insights into this subject as its influence and significance grow into the twenty-first century.

In this Volume, Have and Pedersen debate the idea that listening to audiobooks is a compensatory activity or a second-rate reading experience. Sarah Kozloff take on audiobooks is rather negative: „To many, listening to audiobooks is a debased and lazy way to read with connotations of illiteracy [...]; passivity [...]; abandonment of control [...]; and lack of commitment“ (p.137; cf. also Kozloff, Sarah: „Audio books in a visual culture.“ In: *eJournal of American Culture* 18 [4], 1995, p.83). With a study conducted in Denmark based on a phenome-

nological approach to technology, sound, voice, and multisensorial listening, Have and Pedersen investigated this manner from an aesthetic/perceptual, and sociological perspective. The authors use a number of examples to challenge these notions, showing that the audiobook is more attractive because of the specific new reading experiences it creates and that it should no longer be overlooked by both scholarly and popular discussions of digitization of literature.

The book starts with an introductory chapter presenting the empirical and theoretic approach of the study, which is presented in three main parts. In the first part of the volume „Aesthetics, Sound, Senses“ the concept of ‘reading with the ears’ is discussed, explaining that it is based on different reading experiences. Here, the authors agree with N. Katherine Hayles that a media-specific analysis is important, however they do not share her notion of reading, claiming that it is too idealized and focused on the printed books. Here, they also come to the conclusion that reading can be seen as a multimodal practice after a post-phenomenological analysis where they show that the reading experience depends on where and how you are listening to an audiobook. In the second part of the volume „Affordance and Voice“ the authors explore the relation of reader and medium. Have and Pedersen use the concepts of affordance and voice to reflect how the digital audiobook affects the form of use and experience

of the reader, stating that the performed voice of a narrator gives us a ‚parasocial‘ feeling making the reading experience more interesting and personal (p.15; cf. also Hjarvard, Stig: *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. London/New York: Routledge, 2013). The last part „Usage and Mediatization“ introduces us to the empirical side of the use of an audiobook. Here, the authors explain how book consumption has developed through the years, backed up by surveys and interviews made in Denmark, North America, and Scandinavia. The results show that most of the audiobooks are used by readers on the move; this means that most of the people listening to audiobooks listen to them while they are moving. For example, they mostly listen to them in cars or on a train, walking or working out. As Have and Petersen say, they are „turning wasted time into quality time“ (p.138). They explain that this is because the audiobook is part of an ‘audiotized’ digital media culture where different kinds of audio media like radio, music, audio newspapers and audio therapy are combined in people’s daily life.

The final conclusion puts all the aspects discussed in the book together and addresses two main points. In the first point they address the question of if you read an audiobook or you listen to an audiobook. Here, they say that if we take the aspects discussed in the study in consideration, it becomes clear that listening to an audiobook is a new form of reading. The second point the authors

discuss is if an audiobook can actually be called a book. Here, they say that the audiobook is different because it is not a printed book. The authors state that material wise it is not a book, but as they mentioned before, listening to an audiobook is a new form of reading and that makes possible to call an audiobook an actual book.

As mentioned before, this book is part of a series dedicated to study new media and cyber culture and Have and Pedersen did a great job delivering valuable information based on a massive research with high standard references, making this book a great contribution to digital media studies. I could not agree more with Anne-Mette Bech Albrechtslund, an Assistant Professor, PhD, Department of Communication & Psychology Aalborg University who comments on her book review that „Have and Pedersen contribute to a much needed rethinking of our concept of reading. As such, their book should be of great value to researchers and teachers within different fields who are interested in understanding mobile media use, literary reception, the multimodality of reading, and the relationship between media technology and user experience“ (In: *MedieKultur* 2016, p.235-237). *Digital Audiobooks: New Media, Users and Experiences* encourage new generations to start seeing the activity of audiobook listening as a first-rate reading experience.

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